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ABSTRACT

In recent times, much attention has been given to programs, principles, and practices that reflect an ever-growing trend toward providing for the movement education of all students. Special consideration has been given to the perception of the special needs of the physically disabled. Dance educators, especially, have expressed concerns regarding the compatibility of movement and learning, and the need to formulate courses of study that provide direction for the fulfillment of the interests, feelings, and desires of the handicapped student. This article discusses some of the implications of these newer priorities in education, with special focus upon a particular disability, blindness. Some suggested approaches to the complex task of dance programing for the visually impaired student, with particular emphasis given to the introduction and study of ballet, are presented. (Author/JD)

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DANCE EVERYONE? --

A VIEW OF MOVEMENT EDUCATION AND THE HANDICAPPED STUDENT

BY

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The author writes on a topic that calls attention to the "challenges" created by the modern quest to effect meaningful programs of instruction for the handicapped. As the first in a series of articles and articles-in-progress prompted by recognition of the existent confusion and uncertainties created by the contemporary directive of mainstreaming for the handicapped, "Dance, Everyone?" may be viewed as an initial expression of the author's thoughts, in an area of programing that poses special challenge to the knowledge, insights, and creativity of the dance educator.

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The following article is addressed primarily to the dance educator or arts director, involved, or considering involvement, in specialized movement education programs for the handicapped. Cues and guidelines for instructional planning are expressed, therefore, in the professional vocabulary of the dance specialist. It is hoped, however, that those in education outside of the specialized arts areas, may find viable to programing for the handicapped, several of the ideas and suggestions.

Dorothea May Sironen, Ph. D.

In recent times, much attention has been given to programs, principles, and practices that reflect an ever-growing trend toward providing for the movement education of all students, with consideration given to perception of the special needs of the blind, the deaf, and the physically handicapped.[1] Dance educators, especially, have expressed concerns regarding the compatibility of movement and learning and the need to formulate courses of study that provide direction for the fulfillment of the interests, feelings, and desires of the handicapped student.[2] The writer's direct involvement in the organization and implementation of enrichment programs in the arts, has prompted recognition of a much needed commitment on the part of educators, specialists, and professionals in the performing arts toward the creation of a framework of references to facilitate the quest of determining the "what" and "how" of movement education for the handicapped. This article points

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[1] "Movement and Kinetic Awareness," 1979 Summer Workshop on Movement Education and Kinetic Awareness for Educators and Movement Specialists, School of Education, Hofstra C.W. Post Center of Long Island University, Greenvale, L.I., N.Y., 30 July - 3 August, 1979.

[2] "Dance for the Handicapped," 1979 Teacher Training School Seminar, Dance Educators of America, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, 26 June - 7 July, 1979 and The Waldorf Astoria, 11 - 21 July, 1979.

up some of the implications of these newer priorities in education, with special focus upon a particular disability -- blindness -- and some suggested avenues of approach to the complex task of dance programing for the visually impaired student, with particular emphases given to the introduction and study of ballet.

Movement and its Meanings

Of the many definitions given for the term, movement, the meaningful simplicity of one of several provided by Webster, would seem to suggest appropriateness to an opening dialogue on movement and learning: "...organized action ... toward some goal." Basic to the organization of a course of dance study for the handicapped, is an understanding of all movement, its meanings and purposes as it relates, especially, to the disabled individual, in this particular instance, the blind student. Broad goals for the sight-impaired child in any movement education program might be outlined as follows:

1. To accept the challenges of space with confidence
2. To experience the joy and freedom of movement through limitless opportunities for dance or play
3. To fulfill basic needs in daily living through work-oriented movement: locating rooms, furniture, and other articles in his/her environment; performing simple tasks of seating oneself, food preparation, filling water glasses, arranging a table setting, etc.

4. To participate in an enjoyable group activity, and to share with others the varying degrees of success and difficulties experienced in diverse movement encounters
5. To "channel" excess energies (often manifested in repeated bodily movement -- swaying, rocking, bouncing, seemingly involuntary head turning, hand twisting or wrist shaking, etc.) into purposeful activity that will foster self-discipline, balance, control, and greater mobility
6. To communicate thoughts, feelings, and ideas through movement.

For those involved in the organizational and instructional aspects of movement education programs, dance education for the handicapped, then, implies not only the task of teaching for greater mobility of the student, but also the requirement of providing varieties of experiences directed toward the improvement of personal and social, as well as dance skills. The task creates, moreover, the need for additional concerns and considerations. Of significant importance, are teacher awareness of, and inquiry into:

1. The nature and extent of the child's disability and medical recommendations for inclusion or restriction of certain kinds of activity

2. The special physical,[1] emotional, and psychological needs of the visually impaired student and their implications for dance programing
3. The child's understanding of his/her physical and psychological world, and the relative feasibility of "set" time limits for performance of specific tasks
4. Innovative procedures that may foster student recognition of limitless possibilities for (1)"expressing" feelings, (2) communicating ideas, and (3) demonstrating skills through movement.

Implied, also, is the professional responsibility of the dance educator for self-appraisal in terms of personal commitment, flexibility, specialized background training, and emotional stability -- the "coping power" for dealing with the immediate and future needs of the blind student, necessary curricular modifications, and essential adjustments in, perhaps, typically "technique-oriented " expectations of achievement for students in a program of dance studies.

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[1]For example, in the absence of vision, the feet, necessarily play a prime role in the student's "spatial explorations, " "touch" and "feel," in his/her "discoveries" about self and others(body placement, alignment, muscle contraction, etc.). Noted, also, should be the tendency toward ipsilateral or "same-sided" movement of limbs, rather than the natural (contralateral) movement of arms and legs in opposition.

The Ballet Curriculum

The early ballet curriculum for visually handicapped children (as might be recommended for all novice students) may be viewed as a program of "dance exploration" intended to develop and expand basic "movement" skills and rhythmic awareness. Suggested methodology (1) focuses upon sound/movement relationships, (2) incorporates art,[1] literature, and musical activities that provide the stimuli for student creativity, and (3) encourages individual and group improvisational experiences -- the creation of "isolated" arm, leg, foot, body movement or complete dance "sketches" -- stories, "word" pictures, sound "qualities" serving as idea-incentives. Thoughtfully selected teaching aids and props provide interest and variety for the learner. Through the imaginative and creative use of toys, instruments, materials, fabrics, and other objects from their environment, students may become aware of "ballet" relationships, gain insight into the various qualities and dimensions of movement: e.g., clocks with movable hands, percussion instruments of contrasting timbres, "bouncing" balls, scarves, hoops, etc.

Following, is the identification of principles and procedures applicable to a wide variety of curriculum areas, as they relate to the physical, intellectual, and social dimensions of selected aspects of a suggested program of ballet studies for the visually handicapped child.

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[1] The use and manipulation of art media and materials to convey an idea, create an impression, suggest a movement relationship, reinforce a concept; "touch," "feel," and "hear" experiences organized to assist mental imagery, through the "symbolic" representation of ballet fundamentals: e.g., various dimensional objects, modeling clay, magic putty, "color" pictures (i.e., verbal descriptions of an art object [teacher cues or student responses]).

Body-oriented Activities

Recommended, are introductory experiences that focus upon axial[1] movement -- bending, stretching, circling, as preparatory to the later, more sophisticated challenges of alignment[2] and body placement.[3] (The ballet "turn-out" of the feet, as for all students, not only improves the artistic quality of movement, but also assists the blind student's performance of skills that require control, balance, and coordination.)

Spatial Activities

Early "locomotor"[4] explorations in time and space yield for the child, not only a feel for the "rhythm" and "flow" of all movement, but also serve to build knowledge of the environment, security in his/her surroundings, and personal confidence that are essential to successful participation and achievement in subsequent "technique-focused" dance study.

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[1]Category of movement performed "sur place" -- in one spot.

[2]The artistic "line" created by the harmonious interactions of head-shoulders-arms-feet.

[3]Refers to the dancer's ability to "place" and hold body members in correct alignment to each other. Essential to "aesthetic" appearance and skillful performance, is the student's understanding of basic concepts of line and form: e.g., turn-out of legs and feet, tightly pulled up knees, level hips, "lengthened" spine, "lifted" diaphragm, rounded arms, erect head.

[4]Classification of "traveling movement" forward and back, or in a sideward direction.

Teacher Cues

Qualities and kinds of student movement responses are further dependent upon the precision and quality of teacher cues given. Verbal directives may set the emotional tone of the learning environment: Voice quality and vocal inflection play an important role, suggesting to students the import of an activity, communicating success and achievement, lending hope and encouragement, when needed.

The use of percussion instruments may serve as instrumental cues for students to (1) become familiarized with the physical setting of a studio in their "explorations of space" (go, stop, danger, turn), (2) experience the rhythm of "natural" (walking, running, skipping, sliding, galloping) and its related dance movement, and (3) perform prescribed ballet steps and discover interrelationships of basic dance technique and its ancestor[1] movement.

Suggested, then, is the planning for varieties of movement experiences to percussive instruments selected for their "sound-movement" relationship, i.e., student performance of "natural" movement and basic ballet steps as suggested by different instrumental accompaniments. (Selected instruments may be played in a manner that will influence the "size" (dimension), "level," and "quality" (dynamics) of students' movement responses.) For example: the scraping of a guiro,

[1]Category of "natural" movement devoid of stylization, theatrical treatment, or the classical line: e.g., bending (pliés); jumping (changements).

as accompaniment for brushing action of the feet -- jeté; drum roll, gong, cymbal, as musical cues for spinning -- chaîné, pirouette; tympani, drums, rhythm sticks, providing the rhythmic background for "beating" steps, kicks -- battement, frappé; the use of the glockenspiel, soprano xylophone, as musical-incentives for "tiny" running steps -- bourée, pas de couru.

Sensory Awareness

The efficacy of "musical cues" for technique-based dance programing may be demonstrated, further, in the planning of movement experiences organized to broaden the quality and scope of performance. Musical-idea-incentives[1] emphasizing many levels of emotion, provide students opportunities for demonstrating the portrayal of emotions through movement. (Experiences may be organized to foster student awareness of limitless possibilities for "expressions of feeling" not only through movement characteristically intense or subtle, but also by varying the quality of movement.) For example: joy and happiness, as expressed in jumping, changements; degrees of anger, rage -- frappés, jetés, grands jetés; calm, quiet, serenity -- ports de bras; pain, ecstacy -- torso movements; fear -- retreating steps, bourées; anticipation, excitement -- tiny running steps, pas de courus.

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[1]As used here, the selection and use of instruments to convey a particular idea or emotional quality: e.g., calm, quiet, as suggested by delicately timbred instruments; anger, rage -- bass drum, tympani.

Technique Skills

Subsequent to the Pre-Ballet training period or program of preparatory movement experiences as outlined above, may be a program of basic ballet studies, with the inclusion of significant or related earlier dance-oriented experiences. The goal of technique-focused lesson planning, as for the traditional ballet class, is to develop particular strengths and dance skills, subject to modification as the need arises.

"Les exercices à la barre," designed to (1) develop the "sense" of body placement, (2) stretch and strengthen leg muscles, and (3) render elasticity and flexibility of movement, may include: basic positions of the feet; pliés, tendus; graceful arm movements (ports de bras); the "circular" moves of the ronds de jambes à terre (viewed, also, as preparatory to later "au milieu" progressive circle-wise movement in the line of direction.) Later barre exercise, planned as introductory to sustained or adagio movement, may be expanded to include such "control" steps as dégagé, frappé, tendu fondu, ronds de jambe en l'air. Preparatory allegro movements (e.g., temps levé, échappé, sauté) taught at the barre, provide the groundwork for subsequent center work. Center locomotor progressions may be organized using varieties of "natural" and related dance movement. Opportunities should be provided for performance of both structured combinations and student-improvised dance sketches, based upon dance fundamentals or the acquired student repertoire of steps. Again, the intended focus of instruction,

and student performance ability, are important determinants to the selection of musical accompaniments of appropriate meter and tempi. Finally, suggested, is continued availability to students of varieties of melody and percussion instruments for further musical investigation, "discovery," and rhythmic applications.

Summary and Conclusions

Renewed focus upon movement as a basis of all learning and the interrelationships of muscular/intellectual activity and performance ability poses for the educator, the problem of gaining special skills and understanding of the task to provide students a multi-faceted approach to learning. Needed, it would seem, in the education of the handicapped, especially, are ever-ready "coping" procedures for dealing with the unique problems and situations for which ready-made solutions have yet to be offered. Inherent in the challenges of creating suitable dance experiences, in particular, is the risk of narrowness of purpose and instruction that may foster mere student involvement in series of dance maneuvers or segments of physical exercise that amount to little more than mere mechanical "plays of hands and feet." A contemporary suggestion appears to be one advocating the creation of specialized arts programs (e.g., ballet for visually handicapped children), that provide opportunities for student explo-

ration of the literal, symbolic, and virtuosic meanings of movement, through varieties of activities directed toward, not only greater mobility and dance skills acquisition, but also learners' constructive use of leisure and kinesthetic responses, as understanding participants in the "action" and "drama" of the dance.

There is much to be learned and understood if significant contributions to the education of the handicapped are to be made. Careful study and application of methodology and approaches representing diverse disciplines, may assist the involvement of those in the planning and instructional aspects of movement education programs for the handicapped student, in general, and the blind child, in particular. Knowledge and methodological security, together with openess, flexibility, and creativity, suggest for the educator, an essential blend of the "art" and "science" of teaching, appropriate to guidance of the blind student -- from the simple, early experiences of walking, probing, discovering, "exploring space" -- through the advanced stages of movement or formal dance training. Movement education in terms of "action-learning," requires the most meticulous of "action-planning" -- the united and cooperative efforts of administrators and supervisors, specialists, artists, and educators -- from the formal proposals and groundwork procedures of curriculum organization to the final stages of instruction and "goal-set action" for all students.

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